

House Appropriations

Joint Chiefs, McNamara At Odds on Antimissiles

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff are "firmly and strongly" in favor of deployment of an American antiballistic-missile system—a move vigorously opposed by their boss, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara.

Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, told a House Appropriations subcommittee of the Joint Chiefs unanimous recommendation in testimony during March. A censored version of his testimony was made public last night.

Wheeler gave similar verbal testimony last year.

Wheeler presented the military leaders' opinion to the committee after McNamara had testified and while McNamara was still present in the hearing room.

McNamara, in his statement

argued that the United States and the Soviet Union would react to the deployment of an ABM system by beefing up their ability to overcome the other side's defenses—thus intensifying the arms race without adding to the security of either side.

In fact, he said, the U.S. has increased its intercontinental ballistic missile strength in response to evidence that the Russians are deploying an ABM system around Moscow.

"I submit to you that the Soviet Union is in worse shape, facing greater risks and potentially greater damage to its people and its cities as a result of deploying an ABM than had they not done so," McNamara said.

But Wheeler said it is not certain that the Soviet response would be "equal, opposite, feasible and possible," and that it would be worthwhile to set up a U.S. system to protect American lives.

"The 30-40-50 million American lives that could be saved by a Nike-X, therefore are meaningful, we believe, in every sense of the word," Wheeler said.

Gen. Harold K. Johnson, Army chief of staff, told the committee he and the other Joint Chiefs favored deployment of a light ABM defense, which would protect the country against a relatively unsophisticated attack from China or from accidental bombardment by missiles, while building toward a system that would defend 25 major urban areas from a major attack.

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Hearings of the Subcommittee for Defense Department, House Committee on Appropriations: Defense Department Appropriations for 1968 Part 2